



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – Ambassador Bill Lane USA Gallery Fellowship

Ambassador Bill Lane USA Gallery Fellowship Launch Australian National Maritime Museum, Sydney

(As prepared for delivery – February 16, 2011)

Thank you Mary-Louise for that warm introduction. And thank you to all of the distinguished guests, friends of the Australian National Maritime Museum, and friends of Ambassador Bill Lane, who came here tonight.

I'm especially pleased to see Prime Minister Bob Hawke here tonight. You know I learned tonight that it is dangerous to stand too close to Prime Minister Hawke at one of these events. First, when your picture is taken you never look as good as he does. Second, prolonged exposure can give you charisma burn. But most importantly, he explained to me tonight that when he was Prime Minister, he and Ambassador Lane hatched the plan to build a USA Gallery together. The Prime Minister said to Bill that all they needed now was for Bill to come up with \$30 million. Bill said that he could come up with \$20 million. And so tonight, Prime Minister Hawke asked me for the other \$10M!

It really is a great privilege to be here tonight to honor the National Maritime Museum, and to participate in this evening's launch of a new fellowship honoring one of America's great Ambassadors: Bill Lane.

There is no more fitting tribute to Bill, than this fellowship. It combines his great love of the sea, his great love of the partnership between our two nations, and his commitment to preserving our maritime history for future generations.

I was one of the recipients of Bill's passionate spirit. I first met Bill shortly after I was nominated to serve as the Ambassador to Australia. The day I learned that the President planned to nominate me, I told only my wife and her parents. I didn't tell my parents because they can't keep a secret. And the first thing my mother-in-law said after "Congratulations," was – "you have to call Bill Lane. He is a wonderful man and a great Ambassador." And I promised I'd call as soon as my nomination was official.

And that started a trend. Every time someone learned I was up for this job, they said – "you have to call Bill Lane. He's the best." And every time I said I'd do it as soon as I was announced.



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – Ambassador Bill Lane USA Gallery Fellowship

So the day after I was announced, I came into my office planning to call Bill first thing. And as I walked in the door my secretary held up the phone receiver and said “there is a Bill Lane on the phone who wants to speak to you. . . .”

That was part of his genius. He was always one step ahead. By the time we finished the call, I think he’d already written a letter, included a lovely booklet describing how he and Jean had decorated the Embassy, and had it in a stamped envelope and in the mail box, because it arrived the very next morning.

This energy was infectious. What was so striking is that even though he had served as Ambassador two decades earlier, he was still brimming with enthusiasm for the U.S.-Australia relationship.

I would visit with him whenever I passed through San Francisco. Each time, he would share some new stories of his times in post. He shared many fond memories about this Museum and he described his decades-long friendships with Australian leaders (including Australia’s current Ambassador to the U.S., Kim Beazley). And always, he’d express the tremendous honor that he felt in being welcomed by this nation and especially being awarded the Order of Australia for his service.

In many ways the Pacific was the ultimate symbol and the embodiment of his love of our two nations. This great ocean beside us here is the museum -- the largest body of water in the world -- is not something that divides us – it binds us. The same seas that caress the shores of Bill’s beloved San Francisco hug us here today in Sydney Harbor. It is the great patch of blue that holds us together: a common path we travel, a channel for our trade, and the final resting place for our greatest generations.

Earlier in life, Bill had served in the U.S. Navy with distinction in the Pacific during WWII. And although we worked hard in growing Sunset Magazine into a major publishing force, he never lost his love of the sea or his sense of duty. He always found time for public service, serving in some capacity in every presidential administration from President John Kennedy through to President George W. Bush.

Of all of his titles and positions, he said his proudest posting was as President Reagan’s Ambassador to Australia and Nauru. Indeed, it is fitting that one of his last significant trips was to New York City to attend the centennial celebration of the Great White Fleet’s visit to Australia.

The U.S.-Australia relationship lost a great friend when he passed away last year at the age of 90. I will miss Bill’s friendship, his generosity of spirit, and his great devotion to our planet.



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – Ambassador Bill Lane USA Gallery Fellowship

So on behalf of all of the diplomats who have stepped into – but can never truly fill Bill Lane’s immense shadow -- I want to thank the Australian National Maritime Museum for naming this fellowship in Ambassador Bill Lane's honor. Like the man, I know this fellowship will inspire future generations to love the ocean that connects us.

With gratitude, I officially launch the Ambassador Bill Lane USA Gallery Fellowship.
Thank you.